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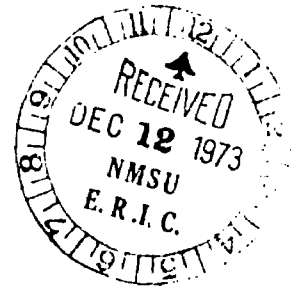
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to provide more understanding of counseling situations in a sample of Alabama high schools. The hypothesis was that the use of counseling services and the student rating of their helpfulness is directly related to the caliber of the counseling provided and the goal orientations and background of the students. The sample consisted of students in the public high schools in 4 counties in Northeast Alabama. Data were collected by a student questionnaire and a questionnaire mailed to each school's principal. Relevant characteristics of the school and counseling programs included school size, student referral system, counselor training, and time commitment. The student questionnaires provided information on sex, curriculum, father's education, and educational and occupational expectations. Major findings included (1) a sizeable number of the students in rural schools are not utilizing counseling services, (2) students in a college preparatory curriculum receive more attention than vocationally-oriented students, and (3) more emphasis is needed on vocational counseling. (PS)

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USE OF COUNSELING IN RURAL HIGH SCHOOLS*

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Introduction

High school counseling services in many rural areas of the U.S. are either totally unavailable or grossly inadequate. Yet, the educational and vocational needs of rural youth are as great, if not greater, than those of urban youth. The scope of counseling needs of rural young people was aptly summarized by Aller (1967) in remarks made at the National Outlook Conference on Rural Youth. He stated:

Rural areas need an improved system of information about employment opportunities and outlook; expanded job placement services and vocational counseling must include for each youth a realistic evaluation of his aptitudes in terms of their relevance to his occupational interests.

High school counseling is one mechanism through which greater awareness of occupational alternatives among youth may be achieved. Thus, this study attempts to analyze student use of counseling in terms of selected school and counseling program variables. Questions to which insights are sought include: To what extent are rural schools providing counseling services? What quality service is available? Which students use counseling services when available and how do student users of counseling evaluate the helpfulness of counseling.

Conceptual Framework and Relevant Research

Counseling is viewed as a process to help individuals toward overcoming obstacles to their personal growth and toward achieving optimum development of their personal resources (Patterson, 1966). Thus, it is

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a process whereby the individual may receive assistance in making his choices and in adjusting to the demands of society.

A search of the literature revealed few studies in which student use of counseling or evaluation of helpfulness was analyzed. Campbell and Dilley (1968) studied counselor helpfulness in relation to school size. They concluded that students in large schools received more encouragement from guidance counselors to enter college than did students in small schools. Differences among schools of varying size were partially attributed to the fact that counseling services in large schools were better developed than those in small schools.

Graff and Maclean (1970) investigated student evaluations of vocational counseling in relation to counselor training at Southern Illinois University. The counseling staff were differentiated into three training levels--doctorates, advanced trainees, and practicum staff. A large proportion of clients who were counseled by advanced trainees and doctoral level staff indicated they had received no help from counselors in becoming informed about vocational opportunities or learning how to make educational or vocational decisions. The researchers concluded that the doctoral level staff had a tendency to view vocational counseling as relatively dull and often delegated this task to the practicum student.

Several studies considered the relationship between student use of counseling and the evaluation of counselor helpfulness by sex, high school curriculum, and occupational goals. Brough (1968) examined selected background factors of ninth graders and their voluntary use of guidance services. A sample of three hundred and fifteen young people was divided into two groups consisting of those who had and had not made voluntary counseling appointments during the two preceding years. Prior to entering ninth grade, 70 percent of the female students but only 53 percent of the male students had made voluntary appointments with a counselor. Similarly, a study conducted at Harvard University (Purnell, 1969) revealed that more girls than boys mentioned guidance counselors as helpful in making their occupational plans.

Hartman (1969) sought to determine whether students in different high school curricula rated counselor helpfulness differently. A sample of 830 Iowa high school seniors was interviewed to determine the influence of counselors on educational and occupational plans. Students reported that counselors had more influence on the occupational plans of the college-bound youth than on those of the non-college bound youth.

This brief review of related research indicates that relatively little information exists on the role which the counselor plays in the formation of educational and occupational goals of youth. Thus the objective of this study is to gain insight into the use students make of counseling services in rural schools and an evaluation of the influence counseling has on the educational and occupational goals of students.

Design of Study

The sample area consisted of four counties in Northeast Alabama comprising the extreme southern portion of the Appalachian Mountain Region. This area is totally rural in character. Out-migration of youth seeking jobs is prevalent since nearby urban centers offer youth the best opportunity for non-agricultural employment.

All public high schools in the study area were identified in terms of the nature of the school system, (county or city) and racial composition. Two small, city systems and two small, Negro schools were included in the sample. The remaining schools in the study area were ranked by size of 12th grade class and one-half the schools were randomly selected.

Data was collected in two phases. First, during the spring of 1968, all seniors in attendance at each of the sample schools on the contact day were interviewed. The procedure involved administering questionnaires in individual classes or in special assemblies.

The second phase of data collection involved a questionnaire mailed to the principal of each high school shortly after completion of the student interviews. Data obtained were focused on various aspects of the counseling services provided and revealed that two schools offered no counseling other than that obtained informally from teachers. These two schools and attending students were eliminated from the study. The relevant student sample included 838 seniors attending 15 high schools.

Data used to determine student use of counseling were obtained by means of a question which asked the student to indicate whether he or she had received counseling outside of the classroom at any time during the current school year. Students were also asked to indicate the number of visits made to the counselor and to rate him or her as "very helpful, some help, no help" in their formation of educational or occupational goals.

The underlying hypothesis was that the use of counseling services and the student rating of their helpfulness is directly related to the caliber of the counseling provided and the goal orientations and background of the students. Specifically, it was anticipated that counseling would be sought most by high aspiring students from more socially deprived backgrounds.

Findings

Counseling Status

Eight of the 15 schools employed full-time guidance personnel. Of the remaining seven, four schools had teacher-counselors involved half-time or less with counseling activities. Three schools had counselors who devoted three-fourths time to counseling. In one of these latter schools counseling services were handled by three teachers, each devoting one-fourth time. In general, the larger schools (more than 100 seniors) employed full-time counselors who had both graduate and occupational counseling training. No instances of cooperative counseling programs between schools or on a county basis were reported at the time of this study.

It is noteworthy that principals reported a trend toward short course and workshop attendance by counseling personnel. Eight of the counselors had received additional training in counseling within the two-year period prior to the survey. Seven of these counselors had received special training in occupational counseling.

Voluntary counseling was found in most schools. Only three schools required individual or group counseling sessions on a regular basis. Whether or not to seek counseling help was a decision made by the individual student in the majority of schools.

Career oriented activities conducted by the schools were widely used and were commonly of three types. Job opportunity speakers were used to varying degrees by fourteen schools and field trips to business establishments by thirteen schools. Field trips to educational institutions such as trade schools, junior colleges and universities were used by ten schools. Ten of the schools used all three types of career activities in their program and all 15 had at least one career oriented activity.

Counseling Use

A total of 363 (44 per cent) of the students interviewed had not used any counseling services during the academic year. Moreover, only 19 per cent of the students had used counseling services on three or more occasions. Clearly, a large number of students in these rural schools were not utilizing the counseling services available to them. This finding suggests a need for concern about the nature of the counseling services available in rural schools and a need for information about the backgrounds of students who use or do not use counseling. Information relating to these considerations was sought by introducing

several characteristics of counseling situations and of students into the analysis.

Selected Characteristics

Characteristics of the school and counseling programs considered relevant included size of school, student referral system, counselor training, and time commitment. Data on each of these characteristics were provided by the high school principals. The student questionnaires provided information on sex, curriculum, education of father, and educational and occupational expectations.

School Size

Large high schools were defined as those with more than 100 students in the senior class. The number of twelfth graders in small schools ranged from 25 to 79 compared to a range of 110 to 155 in large schools.

Some minor difference was observed in the extent to which seniors attending small and large high schools used counseling services, Table 1. Only 53 per cent of the students in small schools had used counseling during their senior year compared to 59 per cent in large schools. Counselors in the larger high schools reached a larger segment of the student population and had more multiple contacts with the students counseled than did those in small schools.

However, quality of counseling services was a complicating factor directly associated with school size. The four largest schools had full-time counselors with graduate training, while the smaller schools had some form of part-time counseling arrangement. It is most likely that the slight differences observed are more a result of this latter factor than of size.

Counseling

Student Referral System

Responses obtained from principals revealed that 5 of the 15 schools followed a policy of requiring counseling sessions for all seniors. One other school highly recommended counseling but did not actually require seniors to participate in counseling activities. In spite of this requirement there was no school in which all seniors reported using the counseling services. Although in these schools students were made aware of the availability of counseling, there remained a large proportion who did not seek assistance. Comparison of student use of counseling

related to the specific referral system showed little difference in the proportion of students contacting or making multiple visits to the counselor.

Size of school was introduced to determine whether the results obtained were consistent for different size schools. In large schools two-thirds of the students had used counseling services where compulsory compared to only 56 per cent where completely voluntary. In small schools this trend was reversed. A slightly larger proportion of students used counseling when the services were on a voluntary basis than when compulsory.

It is interesting to speculate on reasons for this difference. Perhaps students in small schools knew the counselor on a more intimate basis than did students in large schools. This would be expected if the counselor performs other roles within the school structure. Often in small schools teachers or coaches are employed as counselors. In such cases, students would have prior contact with these individuals in different capacities which might lead to more informal voluntary counseling relationships.

Counselor Training

Another aspect of the counseling program which might be a factor in student use is the amount and nature of the counselor's specialized training. The logical expectation is that the better trained the counselor is the more and better services he can and will provide students. Information pertaining to the counselor's training was obtained from the school principal. It was found that the educational preparation of counselors differed considerably by size of school. The majority had some exposure to counseling through graduate courses, but counselors in five small schools had no graduate training in the field whereas all counselors in large schools had such training.

Contrary to expectation, graduate training in counseling had little relationship to student use. Since all four large schools had counselors with graduate training, the comparison was made only for small schools. It was found that slightly more students used counseling in small schools when the counselor had no graduate training than when he or she had graduate training. Although the magnitude of this difference was not large, it does indicate some cause for concern. Counselors with the more specialized training did not achieve a greater incidence of student use. One might ask whether the specialized counselor becomes "too professional" and tends to lose rapport with the students, or perhaps he becomes interested in more "challenging" adjustment problems rather than the educational or vocational concerns of the typical student? Additional research is needed concerning the counselor's role definition in contrast to student needs and their expectations of the counselor.

Counselor Time Commitment

It was observed that the greater the counselor's commitment of time to counseling activities the larger was the proportion of student users. Three time categories of half-time or less, three-quarter time, and full-time were considered. Student use of counseling increased from a low of 39 per cent when the counselor's commitment was half-time or less to a high of 60 per cent when it was a full-time commitment.

Interaction between size of school and the extent of the counselor's time commitment was also observed. When size of school was held constant, it was found that all of the large schools had full-time counselors, (a fact reported previously). Considering only small schools, it was revealed that the amount of student use of counseling was directly associated with variations in the counselor's time commitment. The data clearly indicate that when the counselor has a full-time commitment to counseling activities student use increases.

Students

Since a sizeable number (44 per cent) of the students contacted in the study had not used counseling during their senior year, further analysis was undertaken to provide insight into characteristics of student users and non-users of counseling services. Characteristics investigated included sex of student, current curriculum, education of father, and educational and occupational expectations.

Sex of Student

The sample of students comprising the study was almost equally divided between males and females. The two sexes revealed similar patterns of counseling use. Only slightly greater use was observed among boys than girls, Table 2. Also, boys were only somewhat more likely to have used counseling a multiple number of times during the senior year. Similar patterns were observed in both large and small schools.

Curriculum

Students indicated their high school curriculum as being either college preparatory, general, or vocational. One half of the students stated they were taking a general academic program, while the other half were enrolled equally in the college preparatory and vocational curriculums.

Counseling use was significantly associated with students in the college preparatory curriculum. This selectivity was particularly evident in the proportion of students experiencing multiple contacts with the counselor. Twenty-eight per cent of the college preparatory compared to only 17 per cent of the general and 8 per cent of the vocational students had used counseling three or more times during the senior year. Differences among the three groups of students were particularly evident in the larger schools. These data clearly indicated that many of the students enrolled in vocational programs are not receiving counseling help to the same extent as other students.

Education of Father

It is generally accepted that level of education is one indication of socio-economic class. Persons who attain high educational levels are usually employed in professional jobs and are aware of the importance of planning for educational and occupational pursuits. They usually encourage their children to seek assistance in planning a career. Thus, it was expected that the higher the father's education the greater the proportion of students who used counseling.

Each student indicated the highest grade of school completed by his or her father. Although over one-fourth of the students surveyed were not aware of the level of father's education and provided no information on this dimension a significant relationship was found between father's education and use of counseling among the remaining sample.

Only one-half of the students whose fathers had an eighth grade education or less had used counseling compared to almost three-fifths of the students whose fathers were high school graduates. Larger percentages of students whose fathers were either high school graduates or had post-high school training had used counseling once or twice.

Analysis of the data revealed that among students who used counseling three or more times the trend was reversed. A larger proportion of those students whose fathers had eleventh grade education or less had used counseling three or more times. This could possibly indicate that a small segment of youth from lower social class backgrounds do seek counseling as a substitute for parental guidance. On the other hand, however, an alternative explanation might be that students in lower socio-economic strata were spending more time involved in "adjustive" types of disciplinary counseling which often requires repeated counseling sessions.

Educational Expectations

Student expectations concerning educational goals were considered to be formulated through realistic concern for possible goal attainment.

Whereas an aspiration is a desire for a goal, expectations refer to an individual's estimation of his chances for probable attainment with reference to a particular goal (Kuvlesky and Bealer, 1966). It was found that one-half (50.7 per cent) of the students who had low educational expectations (high school) had not used counseling compared to 38 per cent of those with high expectations (four year college), Table 2.

A significant relationship was found between the educational expectations of these students and their use of counseling services. Students who expected a four year college degree or more were more likely to have used counseling services than were other youth. As the expected level of education increased, so did the number of times counseling was used. Students expecting their educational attainment to be limited to junior college, vocational, or high school training made less use of counseling than those who expected a four-year college degree. These results again emphasize the educational rather than occupational image students seem to have of high school counseling.

Occupational Expectations

The effect of occupational expectation on counseling use showed a pattern similar but less distinct than that observed for educational expectations, Table 2. Students who expected to become professionals used counseling to only a slightly greater extent than did youth who expected to become white or blue collar workers. Sixty per cent of the youth who expected to become professionals had used counseling services compared to 54 and 52 per cent of youth who expected to become white collar and blue collar workers, respectively. Although the data did not show significant differences among the groups, the pattern present suggested some tendency for the more professionally-oriented student to use the counselor's services more than youth not so inclined.

Counseling Helpfulness.

Although the extent of counseling use among rural youth is valuable information, an equally important consideration of counseling usefulness is the evaluation youth make of the assistance received. These students clearly indicated they perceived the primary role of the counselor to be in areas of educational and occupational counseling. Most students who had used educational counseling rated it "helpful" and over one-third rated it "very helpful".

Occupational counseling was not generally viewed as "helpful" as educational counseling. Only one-fifth of the students rated occupational counseling "very helpful" and almost one-third rated it "no help" at all. These data suggest that counselors gave more emphasis to career planning of an educational rather than a vocational nature.

Helpfulness ratings were directly associated with the extent of counseling use during the senior year. The more often a student used counseling, the more likely he or she was to evaluate the benefits as very helpful.

Summary and Implications

The purpose of this study was to provide more understanding of counseling situations as they exist in a sample of Alabama high schools. The results obtained were in substantial agreement with those of other studies involving guidance counseling services.

Findings on counseling services which emerge from this study of rural youth in the Appalachian Region are summarized as follows:

1. A sizeable number of the students in rural schools are not utilizing counseling services. Students enrolled in the small rural high schools should be encouraged to use available services.
2. Students in a college preparatory curriculum who expect to attend college for four years and enjoy professional careers are receiving more attention than vocationally-oriented students. Counselors may be reinforcing high or unrealistic aspirations among high school students at a time when our society needs young adults with varied vocational skills.
3. More emphasis should be given to vocational counseling to bring it in parallel with educational counseling. This underemphasis may be partially attributed to the content of graduate counselor training in psychological testing and personality adjustment rather than vocational and career planning preparation. This type training may reduce the rapport between the students and the counselor.

Table 1. Summary of Relationships Considered Between Frequency of Student Use of Counseling and Selected Counseling Characteristics.

Selected Counseling Characteristics	Frequency of Counseling Use			Total
	None	1 or 2 Times	3 Times or more	
	-----Per cent -----			Number
<u>All Schools</u>				
Size of School				
Large	40.8	38.3	20.4	449
Small	47.0	35.8	17.2	383
Counseling Referral System:				
Voluntary	43.7	39.5	16.8	313
Compulsory	43.5	41.2	15.3	519
<u>Size of School Constant</u>				
Counseling Referral System (large schools):				
Voluntary	43.8	41.9	14.3	313
Compulsory	33.8	48.5	17.7	136
Counseling Referral System (small schools):				
Voluntary	43.7	35.9	20.4	206
Compulsory	50.8	35.6	13.6	177
Training of Counselor (small schools):*				
Graduate	48.6	36.5	14.9	222
No Graduate	44.7	34.8	20.5	161
Counselor Time Commitment (small schools):**				
1/2 Time	59.4	30.4	10.2	69
3/4 Time	51.5	35.3	13.2	136
Full-Time	38.8	38.2	23.0	178

* All counselors in large schools had graduate training in counseling.

** All large schools had a full-time counselor on the faculty. The relationship shown for small schools was statistically significant by chi-square test with a probability of less than .01 ($\chi^2=13.37$ and 4 degrees of freedom).

Table 2. Summary of Relationships Considered Between Frequency of Student Use of Counseling and Selected Student Characteristics.

Selected Student Characteristics	Frequency of Counseling Use			Total
	None	1 or 2 Times	3 times or more	
	-----Per cent -----			Number
<u>All Schools</u>				
Sex:				
Males	39.5	41.0	19.5	425
Females	45.8	39.2	15.0	413
Curriculum:*				
College Prep	36.6	35.6	27.8	202
General	43.6	39.2	17.2	406
Vocational	50.5	33.7	7.6	196
Education of Father**				
High School, Business School, or College	39.1	47.7	13.2	220
9-11 grades	41.5	40.3	18.2	176
Eighth grade or less	50.5	31.6	17.9	212
Educational Expectation:*				
Four Year College	38.3	41.3	20.4	332
Jr. Col., Business or Voc. School	47.5	39.0	13.5	295
High School	50.7	37.4	11.9	211
Occupational Expectation:				
Professional	39.1	40.6	20.3	261
White Collar	46.7	39.2	15.1	199
Blue Collar	47.8	38.2	14.0	186

* Chi Square tested significant with a probability of less than .01
 (Curriculum) $X^2 = 15.69$ and 4 degrees of freedom.
 (Educational Expectation) $X^2 = 13.40$ and 4 degrees of freedom.

** Chi Square tested significant with a probability of less than .05
 $X^2 = 12.56$ and 4 degrees of freedom.

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